

Ambassador White's Remarks
AMCHAM Holiday Reception
Ambassador's Residence, Port-au-Prince
December 4, 2013

Mr. Prime Minister (if present),

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to my residence, and to the annual U.S. Embassy-AmCham Haiti holiday reception. I'd like to thank AmCham President Philippe Armand, the members of the AmCham, and all of tonight's sponsors for their enthusiastic support. The American Embassy and AmCham Haiti have a long history of cooperation to promote trade and investment between our two countries, and over the past year our relationship with AmCham has been stronger than ever.

In 2013, we worked together to host a trade mission from the State of Mississippi, and the visits of multiple investors and businesspeople as they explored opportunities in Haiti. Throughout the year, I personally appreciate the insight of AmCham's members on Haiti's business climate and economy, and I have enjoyed hosting the AmCham board in my home. This year alone, AmCham Haiti's membership increased by 20 percent, and I congratulate you on this clear sign of your leadership within Haiti's private sector.

But as pleased as I am about our shared achievements this year, I am so much more excited by the progress this country is making. My friends, HAITI IS ON THE MOVE. I think you may find some of the data (FACTS) that I am going to talk about to be a bit surprising.

The economy grew faster this year than it did last year. Inflation has dropped, from nearly 8 percent to 4.5 percent. Throughout the country, roads are being built and improved. The U.S. Government is supporting these projects, with a particular focus on connecting farmers to markets, supporting agribusiness development. In downtown Port-au-Prince and in municipalities throughout the country, new government buildings, hospitals, and schools are being constructed and rebuilt. We are proud to partner with the Haitian government on many of these, like the Hôpital de l'Université d'état d'Haïti, a state of the art \$80 million hospital jointly funded by France, the USG and GOH. Construction is under way to rebuild and modernize the Port of Port-au-Prince, and I am proud that an American firm – and a new member of the AmCham, GLF USA – is undertaking that work.

Crime is on the decline in Haiti, and the Haitian National Police is growing stronger. The murder rate dropped 24 percent this year, and the kidnapping rate is down 54 percent in the last five months alone. The police will graduate 1,100 new officers next week, and the first ever class of officers has graduated from the HNP's new mid-level academy. And of that number, 10 percent were women.

There is great news on health, too. The percentage of people testing positive for HIV in Haiti has dropped by more than 60 percent in the last decade – an incredible achievement. The number of people receiving HIV treatment is up, more than 44 percent higher this year than it

was last year. This year the number of cholera cases dropped by more than 50 percent. While even one death from cholera is one too many, cholera fatalities have decreased more than 90 percent since 2010.

New housing is being built across the country – much of it through private sector initiatives – and Haiti's construction sector grew by 11 percent this year. The U.S. is currently constructing 900 homes on two sites, and will break ground on 2,200 new homes at five new sites in the coming year. The number of IDPs has decreased by 87 percent from three years ago, and every day we see more progress. Even from one year ago, the number of tents once scattered over every surface has diminished significantly. You can ALL see that. I congratulate the AmCham for its recent efforts to spur even more housing construction and real estate development. This is one of Haiti's top priorities. Beyond housing, many new, international- standard hotels are being built. They will welcome both business travelers and tourists to explore all that Haiti has to offer. New airports are being built, and the Cap Haitien airport will be able to receive direct commercial flights from the United States in the coming year.

Most important of all, Haiti is attracting jobs. Haiti's total exports are projected to grow by 17 percent this year, based on data just released. Workers are being hired in the manufacturing, construction, and tourism sectors across the country. The agribusiness sector is creating jobs, and 2013 has been a very good year for farmers. Mango exports to the U.S. increased 50 percent this year. The U.S. Government is working with 60,000 farmers, and we are seeing real results. For some crops, productivity has increased fourfold.

After opening just a little over a year ago, the Caracol Industrial Park now employs more than 2,000 workers in its factories, and next month that number will reach 2,700. The Haitian government, the U.S. government, and many of you are working together to increase those numbers exponentially.

If you don't believe me when I say HAITI IS ON THE MOVE, you need only look to the newest investors in Haiti, many of them American and many representing major companies, who see great potential here. I asked a few companies that have recently come to Haiti what drew them here, and this is what they told me: JetBlue, which inaugurates its new air service between Haiti and the United States tomorrow, said, "JetBlue sees great opportunity in serving Haiti, from the increasing business travel needs to connecting families. Demand for nonstop service... opens up more opportunities for Haitian businesses, as well. JetBlue looks forward to building a great partnership with Haiti that produces mutual rewards."

Likewise, Best Western Hotels opened a franchise in Haiti this year – the first American hotel chain to return to Haiti in 15 years. They are doing great business, and have had many days with 100 percent occupancy in the last few months. The folks at Best Western tell me it "has been very gratifying to develop employees to have good results, and to provide good service to our guests..." They felt "it was the right time to invest here, as Haiti is attracting foreign investors and there is momentum."

Marriott Hotels is also building in Haiti. They told me, "We know the role travel and tourism can play in bringing economic development, investment, ongoing commerce, and much-needed jobs to a country. This is especially critical for Haiti, given its long-term recovery efforts. Marriott wanted to be part of that, to help build a new future for Haiti."

In another example, TOMS Shoes will begin manufacturing in Haiti next month, with a 10,000 square foot production facility in Port-au-Prince. TOMS previously donated shoes to Haiti, but the company now says, "Our dedication to Haiti is so much greater, and we look forward to creating jobs and opportunities in Haiti over the next several years... By making such a strong commitment and business investment, we hope to inspire other companies in the fashion and footwear industries to follow suit."

These are companies that know what a great future Haiti has. They are banking on it. I am so proud they are here tonight.

So is everything just dandy here in Haiti? Of course not. We have massive corruption and tax evasion and violence. There is too much poverty. We need more jobs. We need new laws that will fight corruption, and make it easier to register a business, and access credit, and engage in modern commerce. Haiti ranks 163 out of 177 countries for corruption, according to Transparency International. This is virtually unchanged from last year. We have to fight that head-on. It still takes 97 days to register a business in Haiti – there are only two countries in the entire world where it takes longer. That number has also not changed from last year. And while I understand we've started from a tough spot, a lack of improvement is just not good enough. Haiti must do better.

Instead of calls for calm, we hear cries for violence. Believe me: the world does not see the new hotels, or airports, or schools and clinics. They see the same old troubled, dysfunctional country. They see Haitians speaking poorly about their own country. They see tires burning and rocks flying and guns firing. They see gangs in the street and people still living in extreme poverty. So what can be done? Shall we just wring our hands and shake our heads? Certainly NOT.

The people in this room are a big part of the solution. We need to stop the darn violence. You can help with that. We need to project a new image of a Haiti that IS open for business. You can help with that. We need an elite that pays their taxes and refuses to succumb to bribes. You can help with that. Finally, we need leaders that believe that Haiti can be and will be a country of growth and prosperity and stability. Please help with that.

You are the best, the smartest, the most powerful allies I have. Let's move forward together. Let's use our combined wills and FORCE this magical country to reach its fabulous potential and not keep repeating its sad past. If you want a new Haiti, then for heaven's sake, believe in change. Make change happen. You have strong voices, use them. People in the USA and in Haiti listen to you. They trust you. I trust you. Speak out for good. The future of Haiti rests in your hands and hearts and determination.

The United States of America is counting on you. Haiti is counting on you. This is not a burden but a wonderful opportunity. Darn it. Haiti IS too rich to be poor.